Epistemic Reasons II: Basing

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1. Introduction

We often have reasons for our doxastic attitudes. Bobby's reason for thinking that he will be reunited with an old friend is that a fortune cookie said so, while Edna's reason for suspending judgment on string theory is that it makes too few falsifiable predictions. Bobby and Edna should be distinguished from Jessie, whose brain lesion just caused some groundless beliefs to pop into her head. While the brain lesion is a reason why she has these beliefs, she lacks reasons of her own for them. Meta-ethicists refer to a similar distinction among reasons for action as the distinction between *explanatory* and *motivating reasons*. But because it is controversial to speak of "motivation" for doxastic attitudes, we need different terminology. Following Scanlon (1998: 19), I'll use the phrase "operative reasons".

This article is an opinionated guide to the literature on operative epistemic reasons. This literature includes what epistemologists typically put under the heading of "the basing relation". But the relevant literature is broader. Many philosophers working on general questions about reasons and reasoning outside of epistemology narrowly construed have greatly illuminated the topic. Moreover, some work on inference hasn't taken place under the "basing relation" rubric, though the issues should be discussed together. This article puts these regions of literature under a single heading.

The discussion is organized around the following questions:

1. *Ontology*. What sorts of things are operative epistemic reasons? Mental states, facts, propositions, or what?

2. *General Conditions*. What relation must a reason bear to someone's belief to be her operative epistemic reason for it? Is this relation causal, dispositional, or what?

   If reasons are propositions or facts, what epistemic relation must one bear to them to have them as operative epistemic reasons? Is it knowledge, belief, or what?

3. *Inferential Reasons*. What is it for a belief to be *inferentially* based on a reason?

4. *Non-Inferential Reasons*. Are there *non-inferential* reasons for belief? If so, how do they resemble inferential reasons and how do they differ?

§2-5 pursue these questions in order.[1]

2. The Ontology of Operative Epistemic Reasons

To what ontological category do operative epistemic reasons ("OERs") belong? Following Turri (2009), we can distinguish three views:

Mentalism: OERs are mental states.

[1] Note that while the prequel to this article discusses parallel questions about the ontology of normative reasons, there are different arguments to consider, and the parallel views should be distinguished. Indeed, several writers deny that normative and operative reasons belong to the same ontological category (see, e.g., Lord (2008), Mantel (2015), Raz (1975), and Smith (1994)).

Abstractionism: OERs are (perhaps false) propositions or (perhaps non-obtaining) states of affairs.

Factualism: OERs are facts.

Mentalism is the traditional view. Explicit proponents include Davidson (1986), Pryor (2007), Swain (1981), and Turri (2009), and many other epistemologists assume the view. The analogous view in the philosophy of practical reason was popular until Dancy (2000); even figures who embraced factualism about normative reasons were mentalists about operative reasons.[2] While mentalism was historically dominant, many epistemologists now defend non-mentalist views. Factualists include Hyman (1999), Littlejohn (2012), and Unger (1975). Abstractionists include Fantl and McGrath (2009) and Millar (2004).

For Mentalism

One argument for mentalism is that it provides the simplest explanation of the necessary correlation between OERs and mental states.[3] Whenever someone has an OER for a belief, she is in a further mental state. Exactly which mental states correlate with OERs is controversial, but the correlation is undeniable. What explains it? Mentalism gives a lovely answer: the OERs = the mental states.

Non-mentalists have a clear alternative picture. They say that although one cannot possess p as one's OER unless one bears some attitude to p, the reason itself is p. This picture may sound more complex because it seems to posit OERs over and above mental states. But is the ontological baggage weightier? Both camps acknowledge attitudes, contents, and the operative-reason-for relation. They just have different views about the relata of the relation. Calculated correctly, then, the weight of the ontological baggage seems the same.

A second argument for mentalism is inspired by Davidson (1980):

1. Rationalizing explanations of doxastic attitudes are causal explanations.

2. The relevant causal factors are mental states.

3. So, OERs are mental states.

Factualists will reject (2) and say that the *objects* of certain mental states are the relevant causal factors. This picture is attractive in some cases. "John believes it rained because the streets are wet" sounds like it could be literally true. Life is more complicated, however, due to the possibility of reasoning in the light (or darkness?) of false beliefs. Here we cannot straightforwardly replace causally relevant mental states with worldly facts. And surely *false propositions* are not causes. So how can non-mentalists view rationalizing explanations as causal?

Some non-mentalists reply by independently arguing against (1). Such is Dancy (2000, 2004)'s tack. He holds that reasons explain attitudes and acts by *making sense of them*, where that is a normative notion. Dancy doesn't deny that they do this in part by being represented by other causally active attitudes. Rationalizing explanations are *accompanied by* causal explanations. But Dancy denies that the relata of the causal explanations are the reasons themselves.

Another argument proceeds from facts about reasons talk, particularly in error cases. We often say things of the form "S has doxastic attitude D(p) because she believes q". When q is false, many feel they cannot felicitously omit the "she believes" bit. So we get some evidence for mentalism in error cases. Assuming Williams (1981: 102)'s dictum that "[t]he distinction between true and false beliefs on the agent's part cannot alter the *form* of the explanation which will be appropriate", it seems that in both good and bad cases, the person's reason is *really* her belief.

This argument is inconclusive. Dancy (2004) reports an opposing intuition about sentences like: "His reason for doing it was that it would increase his pension, but he was sadly mistaken about that." Moreover, Dancy (2000) notes that non-mentalists can render what is expressed by "because s/he

[2] See, e.g., Raz (1975) and Smith (1994).
[3] Cf. Turri (2009: 54-55)'s "Master Argument".

believed..." sentences in appositional sentences like "S's reason for D(p)-ing is, as she believes, q", whose truth is consistent with non-mentalism. Another move would be to question Williams's dictum. Hornsby (2008), for example, proposes a disjunctive picture on which operative reasons are (known) facts in the good case and (believed) propositions in the bad case.

For Non-Mentalism

Dancy (2000)'s argument for non-mentalism begins with a desideratum on an account of φ-ing for reasons: it must be compatible with the fact that we can φ for normative reasons. Dancy argues that mentalists cannot accommodate this desideratum, because normative reasons are, he maintains, typically facts about the world, not beliefs or other mental states.[4]

This argument alone is unlikely to convert epistemologists. As noted in the prequel, mentalism about normative reasons in epistemology is no less popular than mentalism about operative reasons. Granting, however, that we ought to reject mentalism about operative practical reasons, one might supplement Dancy's argument with an argument from the unity of reason.

These arguments combined undermine mentalism. Some epistemologists might conclude that we should reconsider the parallel arguments in meta-ethics, and contend that across-the-board mentalism achieves better unity. They haven't done so yet, however.

Other arguments against mentalism parallel arguments in the normative case. Since I discussed the latter arguments in the prequel, I'll only briefly mention two. One is that non-mentalism gets the phenomenology of believing for reasons right. Reasoning is "transparent": when we reason about whether p, our attention is directed at (apparent) facts that bear on p.[5] Presumably in reasoning we are attending to reasons, some of which become our OERs. If so, transparency supports non-mentalism.

Another argument proceeds from reasons talk. We often say things of the form "S's reason for D(p)-ing is that q"; as Pryor (2007) notes, we don't ordinarily hear claims of the form "S's reason for D(p)-ing is her belief that q". We do hear things of the form "S D(p)s because she believes q". But non-mentalists needn't disagree that beliefs causally explain other beliefs, and the crucial sentence form uses "because" rather than "for the reason that". The linguistic support is, however, indecisive, partly because of the felt need to mention beliefs in bad cases.[6]

Problems for Non-Mentalists

Non-mentalism is not without its problems. Factualists have trouble with ignorance. Even if one denies that mental duplicates necessarily have the same *normative* epistemic reasons, it is hard to deny they have the same *operative* epistemic reasons. Yet if OERs can be externalia, the latter claim cannot be true. Some factualists may reject even that claim,[7] but doing so is costly.

We can switch to abstractionism to avoid this cost, but abstractionists also have problems to solve. Operative reasons ascriptions strike many as factive. "John's reason for going to the party is that Mary is there" just seems to entail that Mary is there. There are, however, alternative explanations: Comesaña and McGrath (2014) argue that the intuitions are better explained by regarding the apparent entailment as an *uninherited, non-entailed presupposition*.

Another problem is that abstractionism does not obviously explain how we can act for normative reasons. Dancy (2000: 115) denies that operative reasons are propositions partly because he thinks they cannot be normative reasons. Dancy regards normative reasons as states of affairs, but as Lord (2008) notes, he himself thinks these are poor candidates for objects of attitudes. One might worry that they are thus equally poor candidates for OERs.

Dancy's other reason for denying that OERs are propositions—viz., that sentences of the form "S's reason for φ-ing is the proposition that p" normally sound wrong—generalizes to any abstractionist

[4] The inference here rests on another assumption one might question—viz., that to φ for a normative reason, one's operative reason must be *identical* to the normative reason. An alternative view is that φ-ing for a normative reason consists in having an operative reason that *represents* the normative reason. Cf. Mantel (2015).
[5] Cf. Shah (2006).
[6] For further discussion of the linguistic case for non-mentalism, see Pryor (2007).
[7] See Lord (2013).

proposal. Most sentences of the form "S's reason for φ-ing is the abstract object, X" will also sound wrong, after all. The upshot might be that such linguistic evidence calls for some other explanation on pain of refuting every alternative to factualism and mentalism, Dancy's included.

Pluralism

One response to the disagreement between factualists and abstractionists is to deem it shallow. Consider the variety of constructions that give rationalizing explanations. Some sound factive, like "S's reason for believing p is that q." Others are not, like "S reasoned to the conclusion that p from the premises q and r". Yet others are not clearly factive, like "S's rationale for believing that p included these considerations: q, r, s...."[8] Some draw irenic conclusions from this variety of constructions. While Hyman (1999) seemed to argue that OERs are always known facts, he later clarified that although we can use "reasons" to refer to premises that may be false, we "sometimes use the term 'reason' to express a different idea: the idea of a person's being guided by a fact."[9] And while Lord (2013) treats all operative reasons attributions as factive, he admits that there is another kind of explanation—via "rationales"—that is not.

3. Having Operative Epistemic Reasons

For convenience, I'll henceforth talk as if OERs are propositions. Our next question is:

- What does it take for p to be S's OER for doxastic attitude D(q)?

Three conditions have been suggested:

- *Representational Condition*: S is in some to-be-determined type of mental state with the content that p.
- *Treating Condition*: S treats p as a normative epistemic reason for D(q)-ing.
- *Explanatory Condition*: S's D(q)-ing is non-deviantly explained by certain mental states (e.g., a belief in p, or treating of p as a good reason to D(q)).

Disagreement abounds about how each condition should be understood.

3.1. *The Representational Condition*

One disagreement hearkens back to the factualism/non-factualism debate. Factualists tend to favor the view that S must know p to act for the reason that p. Such was Unger (1975)'s view and, it seemed, Hyman (1999)'s. Non-factualists prefer the view that belief is all that is required. If pluralists are right, some of the disagreement here is superficial.

But even if we should acknowledge both factive and non-factive rationalizing explanations, questions remain about representation. One question is whether the representational states must be doxastic. Can p be one's reason for believing q if it merely non-doxastically seems to one that p? Because those who give non-doxastic seemings a big role in epistemology tend to be mentalists, this question has received no attention.

A second question that arises for factive rationalizing explanations is whether one must know a fact to be guided by it (see Hyman (1999)), or whether less is required (see Locke (2015)). The answer partly turns on fake barn cases. One can, it seems, reason from the perceived fact that the structure is a barn in such cases. So it may seem that one needn't know a fact to be guided by it. But Sosa (2007)

[8] The point here isn't that because causal and rationalizing explanations are distinct, we should be pluralists. The point is rather that there are different ways of giving *rationalizing* explanations, some of which seem non-factive and some of which seem factive.
[9] Hyman (2011: 360).

maintains that we have a kind of knowledge in fake barn cases; if one likes his animal/reflective knowledge distinction, one can insist that all that follows is that guidance only requires animal knowledge.

A third question is whether the representation condition must be conceptual. Some, like McDowell (1994), say the space of reasons is contained within the space of concepts. Others, like Heck (2000), disagree. This disagreement raises a new question: can the content of an experience be one's OER if one lacks the concepts required for correctly specifying that content, as non-conceptualists (e.g., Peacocke (2001)) maintain? We'll revisit this question in §5.

3.2. *The Explanatory Condition*

OERs are a special case of explanatory reasons. How should we understand the explanatory relation between OERs and beliefs? This is one of the most widely discussed questions about OERs, often addressed under the heading of "the basing relation".

We saw earlier that Dancy denied that rationalizing explanations are causal. Still, rationalizing explanations are surely *underwritten* by causal explanations, in the sense that the mental states that *represent* reasons causally explain beliefs. Hence, even non-mentalists favor causal accounts.[10] The dominant theories of basing are all broadly causal.[11]

The most popular causal theory is the sustaining cause theory.[12] On this view, OERs explain doxastic attitudes by being (contents of) mental states that are among their sustaining causes. One version of this view is:

> **Simple Sustaining View (SSV)**: p is S's OER for D(q)-ing iff p is the content of a presentational mental state which is a sustaining cause of S's D(q)-ing.

SSV faces several problems. One is that causal sustaining is insufficient for basing. To borrow an example from Turri (2011: 389), we can imagine that "through some random quirk—the result of a neural assembly malfunctioning—Wilt's belief that the lettuce wilted [causally sustains] his belief that the Patriots will win twelve games this season."[13] Since the former belief is not Wilt's reason for the latter, SSV fails provide sufficient conditions. Defenders of SSV hence must explain what makes a sustaining cause *non-deviant*.

Another objection questions the necessity of causal sustaining. In Lehrer (1971)'s beloved superstitious lawyer case, we imagine a lawyer, Sal, is reviewing the evidence bearing on whether his client, Bob, is guilty of eight murders. There is good evidence Bob did all eight. But Sal always follows the cards, which suggest that Bob is innocent of the eighth. Sal decides to reconsider the evidence. In reconsidering it, he stumbles upon decisive evidence that Sam is innocent of the eighth murder. But, Lehrer adds,

> if it were not for his unshakable faith in the cards, the lawyer himself would be swayed by...emotional factors and would doubt that his client was innocent of that eighth murder. It is only because of his faith in the cards that the reasoning gives him knowledge. Therefore, the reasoning that gives him knowledge does not even potentially explain his belief that his client is innocent of the eighth crime.[14]

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[10] See Armstrong (1973: Ch. 6), Audi (1993), and Moser (1989: 156-158).

[11] Counterfactual theories like Swain (1981)'s may be distinguished from causal theories, but Swain held such a counterfactual theory partly because he held a counterfactual analysis of causation; without it, his view would be better seen as a disjunctive view with causal and counterfactual elements. Because counterfactual analyses of causation are now unpopular, I won't discuss pure counterfactual theories. For discussion, see Korcz (2010).

[12] See Armstrong (1973) and Moser (1989) for pure versions, and Audi (1993) for a hybrid. An alternative I won't discuss is the original cause theory, on which OERs for D(p) are (contents of) mental states that are original causes of D(p). This view fails because one can gain new bases for belief and lose the old ones.

[13] Turri's case had an original causal chain, but it can be restyled to undermine SSV, as I've done.

[14] Lehrer (1971: 848).

Lehrer claims that the evidence is Sal's reason (since he has knowledge), but that his belief is nonetheless wholly sustained by faith in the cards. The case persuaded Swain (1981) to pursue a more complicated analysis, deeming reasons like Sal's "pseudo-overdeterminants" and allowing them as well as sustainers to be bases. It moved others, like Tolliver (1982) and Lehrer himself, to accept *pure doxastic views* on which D(q)-ing for reason r is grounded in a meta-belief to the effect that r is a good epistemic reason for D(q)-ing.

Many have, however, been unconvinced by Lehrer's case.[15] If we dismiss it, we can avoid some epicycles in our analysis. But we still need a solution to the deviance problem. One recent solution is Turri (2011)'s. According to Turri, OERs are sustaining causes of beliefs that manifest a "cognitive trait", which is a belief-forming disposition ingrained in our cognitive character. In the deviance counterexample above, Wilt's belief manifested no such trait: the sustaining relation owed to a quirky neurological malfunction. Hence, Turri's proposal blocks that counterexample.

It is unclear that the cognitive trait requirement blocks all deviance counterexamples, however. Consider an example modified from Boghossian (2014: 4). A pessimistic character might be regularly caused to think 'Yet so much food is bad' whenever he thinks 'Some food is good'. The fact that this transition manifests his pessimistic character makes no difference to the intuition that he doesn't base his belief that so much food is bad on his belief that some food is good.

3.3. *The Treating Condition (and a Revised Explanatory Condition)*

One way to avoid this problem was foreshadowed by *causal-doxastic theories*, which require that the subject also believe that the consideration that causally sustains her belief is a normative epistemic reason.[16] These views arguably overintellectualize basing by requiring believers to have the concept of a normative reason. There are, however, spinoff views that avoid overintellectualization by appealing to the weaker idea of *treating something as a normative reason*.

Treating something as a reason does not require having the concept of a reason. This is an instance of the more general thought that treating Xs as Fs doesn't require the concept of an F. Cats, for example, can treat entities as prey while lacking the concept PREY. Inferring from p from q entails treating q as a normative reason to believe p, but does not require having or using the concept NORMATIVE REASON.

Current accounts of basing invoke treating, though there is disagreement about its nature. Ram Neta takes treating p as a reason to believe q to involve inner ostension to an explanatory relation under a demonstrative concept for a justifying relation.[17] Errol Lord and I understand treating dispositionally, though unlike Turri, we don't see the relevant dispositions as *character traits* but rather as *competences*. Following Sosa (2015), we take the notion of competence as primitive.[18]

This is not to say that nothing informative can be said about competences. Competences are a special case of dispositions to succeed in appropriate situations and when in appropriate "shape", relative to some standard of success. The competence constitutive of treating is a competence to conform to some pattern of thought. "Success" in this context is, of course, anemic: it is just conformity to the pattern. Bad reasoning is possible since the pattern might correspond to a bad rule. Such reasoning nonetheless manifests a competence in the thin sense in which all "know-how" manifests competence. Compare how one can have a competence to win a bad game, by manifesting a disposition to win relative to the bad constitutive standards of the game.

Treating enables Neta, Lord and I to converge on a better account of the explanatory condition. To see the account, consider a subject S who believes q for the reason that p. We say this is true because:

> S treats p-like considerations as normative reasons to believe q-like propositions

and

> as a manifestation of that fact, S's belief that p explains why S believes that q.

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[15] For example, Turri (2011) calls Lehrer's claim that Sal's belief is based on the relevant evidence "clearly false" and Goldman (1979) calls it "unconvincing".

[16] See Audi (1993), Longino (1978), and Korcz (2000).

[17] See Neta (Ms), which grew out of Neta (2013). Marcus (2012) has a kindred view.

[18] See Lord (2013) and Lord and Sylvan (Ms).

More generally:

> **Explanation in Virtue of Treating**: p is S's OER for doxastic attitude D(q) iff
>
> (i) S treats p-like considerations as normative reasons for D(q)-like attitudes and
> (ii) as a manifestation of that fact, S's representing that p explains why S is D(q)-ing.

Causal-doxastic accounts of basing can be understood as special cases of this view, *modulo* the false assumption that treating p as a reason to φ is believing that p is a reason to φ. If treating is understood dispositionally, the account resembles the views of Turri (2011) and Evans (2012). But by appealing to the competences constitutive of treating, the account avoids deviance worries for these views.

4. Inferential Reasons and Reasoning

There are different ways in which a consideration can become one's OER. Many OERs are *inferential*: they become our OERs because we make inferences from them. Inference is thus an important subtopic here. Following Harman (1986), we should distinguish the activity of inference from the proofs or arguments inferences sometimes track. Focusing on the activity, let's ask:

- What is it to infer one proposition from another?

Uncontroversially, inferring p from q involves transitioning from a mental state whose content is q to a mental state whose content is p. Two sub-questions are (i) what kinds of mental states are suitable beginnings and ends of such transitions, and (ii) what the transitioning itself involves.

A simple answer to (i) would see the relevant mental states as outright doxastic attitudes and perhaps graded ones like credence .63.[19] But this answer ignores suppositional reasoning: when we assume p for *reductio* and infer q, our attitudes towards p and q aren't outright or graded beliefs.[20] Even bracketing suppositional reasoning, there is a possible asymmetry between premise-states and conclusion-states. While the conclusion-state must be one over which we have rational control, it is unobvious that we need rational control over premise-states. One cannot infer *to* non-doxastic seemings, but it is not obvious why one cannot infer *from* non-doxastic seemings.

Sub-question (ii) is harder. The answer is not just that the premise-states cause the conclusion-state. Even setting worries about deviant causation aside, this answer conflicts with the agential nature of inference. Inferring is something we do, not something that happens to us.[21] Perhaps we can extend ``inference" to refer to passive subpersonal processes, but paradigmatic inferences are, as Boghossian (2014: 3) says, "person-level, conscious, and voluntary".

Accordingly, a central approach to question (ii) treats inference as a species of rule-following. Broome (2014b) says this approach captures the active nature of inference, because in following a rule, "[t]he rule does not merely cause you to behave in a particular way, as a program does to a computer. The rule *guides* you."

There are obstacles to analyzing inference in terms of rule-following. Suppose we understand guidance by a rule as intentional guidance. How does one then follow a rule of the form, "In conditions C, φ!"? By doing another inference, it seems. As Boghossian writes: "On this Intentional construal of rule-following, then, my actively applying a rule can only be understood as a matter of my grasping what the rule requires…and *drawing the conclusion* that I must now perform the act required by its consequent."[22] If rule-following consists in intentional guidance, inference cannot consist in rule-following on pain of regress or circularity.

The alternative is *dispositionalism*, on which following R consists in a disposition to conform to R. Doubts about dispositionalism became prominent after Kripke (1982). While not everyone has been

[19] For a discussion of whether we can reason with credences, see Staffel (2013).
[20] See Wright (2014), who complained that Boghossian (2014)'s discussion of inference ignores this case.
[21] See, for example, Boghossian (2014) and Broome (2013, 2014a).
[22] Boghossian (2014: 13)

convinced by Kripke's doubts, themes from his discussion resurface here. Boghossian raises the following Kripke-inspired objections:

1. A person's dispositions are finite in the sense that (e.g.) "it is not true that I have a disposition to answer q when asked what follows from any two propositions of the form p and `if p, then q', no matter now large."[23]

2. A person's dispositions will be infected with performance errors.

3. Dispositions to conform in particular cases are explained by rule-following, not vice versa.

4. If the rule-following involved in inference is merely dispositional, it will "just look like the regular causation of some thoughts by others, without the element of taking [premises to be reasons for conclusions] that Frege rightly saw to be essential to inference."[24]

Suppose we switch from generic dispositionalism to a specifically competence-based approach. Sosa (2015) argues that competences in general are not just dispositions to succeed but at best a "very special case" of dispositions to succeed. He argues, indeed, that the notion of competence should be taken as primitive. While this is not the place to defend Sosa's view, it is clear how it would help in this context.

Let's take rule-following to consist in the manifestation of a competence to conform to the rule. Performance errors are no strike against this view: they are not manifestations of competence, so (2) is irrelevant or false. Moreover, because competences aren't *just* dispositions to succeed, a person's competence can explain more specific dispositions of hers to succeed. She has these more specific dispositions *in virtue of* her competence. So (3) doesn't undermine a competence-based proposal. Furthermore, an attitude that manifests competence is not just "regularly caused" by it. Indeed, manifesting a competence to conform to a rule permitting conclusion C given premises P1...Pn plausibly *constitutes* a way of taking P1...Pn to be reasons for concluding C, yielding the "Taking Condition" Boghossian finds missing from mere cases of regular causation. So (4) is no objection to a competence-based proposal.

What about (1)? Compare linguistic competence. It exhibits what Chomsky calls "discrete infinity", enabling me to grasp indefinitely many sentences. So competence can be unbounded. Boghossian recognizes that dispositions can be unbounded even if realized in finite material. But what, then, is the objection? He says it comes down to the following: "[A] capacity to grasp infinitely long propositions...does not follow from our nature as thinking beings [whereas] in the case of [a fragile] glass, the existence of the infinite number of inputs...just follows from the nature of the glass qua physical object."[25] If this is an objection to viewing inferential rule-following as grounded in logical competence, it is also an objection to viewing syntactic rule-following as grounded in linguistic competence. That seems wrong.

This view shares a cost of Boghossian's ultimate view. He says we should take rule-following as primitive; I say we should take competence as primitive. But competence can do more work than rule-following, as the plausibility of competence-based approaches to knowledge, perception, action, and other topics shows. The notions of competence and manifestation resolve problems of deviant causation in all these areas. So these notions seem better candidates for inclusion in primitive ideology.

Hence, I tentatively suggest that we can understand inferring p from q as manifesting a competence to conform to a rule that recommends believing p given q. It should be stressed that the notion of competence here is not robustly normative, but normative only in the thin sense in which any standard of correctness is normative. Compare how a person who acts intentionally manifests an intention-fulfilling competence, though the action and intention might be irrational. We want a thin notion of competence here to allow for reasoning with bad rules.

[23] Boghossian (2008: 496).
[24] Boghossian (2014: 15).
[25] Boghossian (2008: 496).

5. Non-Inferential Reasons?

Let's tackle a final question: can there be non-inferential operative reasons? One might think foundationalists will say "yes". Foundationalism is typically defined as the view that there are non-inferentially justified beliefs on which all other justified beliefs are inferentially based. If all justified beliefs are justified by reasons—a controversial claim, but one endorsed by many foundationalists—doesn't it follow that some reasons justify non-inferentially? And for our beliefs to be justified by them, mustn't we have non-inferential OERs?

This is a little fast. What foundationalists need are beliefs that are justified but not by mental states that require justification—properly basic beliefs, as some say. It is not trivial to assume that properly basic beliefs aren't inferentially justified. We'd need to invoke some principle according to which all inputs to inference call for justification. If mental states that are "beyond justification" can be inputs to inferences, we could reject this principle.

Why can't we start inferences with such states? An answer emerges if we view OERs as propositions. Suppositional reasoning aside, it is natural to think that to make an inference from p, one must endorse p. Endorsements call for justification. If so, inputs to inferences couldn't be regress stoppers. The fact that suppositions don't require endorsement or justification is no help, since *they* are not satisfying regress-stoppers. So if theoretical inferences must begin with endorsements, we must identify properly basic and non-inferentially justified beliefs.

That conclusion still doesn't force us to embrace non-inferential reasons. We must also assume that all justified beliefs are justified by reasons. Some reliabilists reject this claim; internalists who appeal to entitlement do so too.[26] Other foundationalists, however, must embrace non-inferential reasons.

So what are non-inferential OERs? How does one have something as one's OER without making an inference from it? These questions demand a two-part answer. One must specify

> (A) the kinds of mental states that accompany non-inferential OERs, and
>
> (B) the relations that hold between non-inferential OERs and beliefs and how, if at all, they differ from parallel relations in inferential cases.

We could distinguish non-inferential from inferential OERs in both ways. More has been said about (A) than (B), so my discussion of (B) will be speculative.

Developments of (A)

Foundationalists say a lot about what kinds of states can provide non-inferential *normative* reasons. Two options already mentioned are seemings and direct acquaintance.[27] Another option is to appeal to experiences, understood as distinct from seemings. Seemings have conceptual content, but some think experiences have non-conceptual content.[28] One might convert these views about normative epistemic reasons and into views about OERs. Since the foundationalists who accept these views typically assume mentalism, they could say that non-inferential OERs are states of these kinds.

If we reject mentalism, we could instead say that non-inferential OERs are contents of states of these kinds. But the third option is now mysterious. How can a content of experience I lack the concepts to grasp be *my* reason for anything? This worry led some to conclude that non-inferential OERs must be associated with conceptual states.[29] It is a serious worry when framed as one about OERs. Bare facts can be *normative* reasons, and this fact calls into question unqualified conceptualist claims like the claim that the space of reasons is the space of concepts. Still, for normative reasons to be *our* reasons, we must represent them at the person level.

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[26] See Lyons (2009) and Wright (2004), respectively.
[27] See Huemer (2007) and Fumerton (1995).
[28] See Heck (2000) and Peacocke (2004).
[29] See Brewer (1999) and Ginsborg (2011).

We have support, then, for thinking that non-inferential OERs go with conceptual states. It doesn't follow that these require *justification*. Non-doxastic seemings aren't the kinds of things that can be justified, though perhaps they can be evaluted in other ways.

Developments of (B)

What are the relations between non-inferential reasons and beliefs in virtue of which the former constitute OERs for the latter? How do they differ from parallel relations in inferential cases?

Take the second question first. Suppose we follow Broome and Boghossian in viewing inference as active. Inferential basing relations obtain in virtue of our making inferences. One hypothesis about the difference between the inferential and the non-inferential cases is that non-inferential basing relations don't obtain in virtue of person-level activities. Rather, what establishes a non-inferential basing relation is some subpersonal process.

This hypothesis gets the phenomenology of non-inferential justification right. Imagine looking at a square, seeing that it's square and thereby being non-inferentially justified in believing that it's square. The phenomenology has an *immediate* character: you *just see* that it's a square. Some conclude—too quickly—that this is not a case of basing on reasons at all. Instead, we can take it to be a case of non-inferential basing, which differs from inferential basing precisely in not being established by a person-level process of citing reasons and judging accordingly. *That* is why it feels immediate, not because there is no basis.

Some might see this view's price as too steep. They might say: "OERs are person-level phenomena. Reasons that operate subpersonally are mere explanatory reasons."[30] My response is to agree that the *result* of the process running from looks to beliefs is the person-level phenomenon of believing for a reason, but that the *process* is subpersonal. This response is principled. We already needed to distinguish process and result in the inferential case. *Believing for an inferential reason* isn't itself the activity of making an inference: it is the result of that activity. Similarly, believing for a non-inferential reason isn't the subpersonal movement from appearance to belief: it is the result. And it would be question-begging and wrong to insist that something person-level can't result from something subpersonal. The subpersonal level is more fundamental, so there must be some story about how the person level is grounded in it.

A different objection is that some cases of non-inferential justification seem to involve a person-level process. Suppose I look at a square, ask what it is, and judge that it's a square because it looks thus-and-so. Isn't this a case of foundational justification? If so, doesn't it follow that a non-inferential basing relation can come to obtain via a person-level process?

One might deny that this is a case of foundational justification. Perhaps I am making an inference from <x looks thus-and-so> to <x is a square>. The justification is *nearly* foundational, but not foundational. One might object that this response implies that our foundations will be too sparse, consisting just of demonstrative beliefs about looks. But the response is that which beliefs are foundationally justified can vary from subject to subject. In the case of our unusually deliberative subject, the foundations run deeper. But a subject who didn't make the inference, but "just saw" that it is a square, wouldn't have a belief any less foundational *for her*. The deliberative subject herself could stop deliberating and opt for shallower foundations.

Our simple take on (B) has survived: the only difference in the relations that ground inferential and non-inferential reasons is that the basing relations are established by person-level activity in the former case and subpersonally in the latter. But this is to say nothing about the nature of the subpersonal process and how it grounds person-level basing. Hard work remains there.

6. Conclusion

Some of the most important work on OERs has barely gotten started. While the literature on ontology and basing is rich, the key epistemological issues aren't settled fully by views on these matters. The status of traditional foundationalism and the rational role of experience turn more on how we understand

[30] Cf. McDowell (1994: 163).

the processes by which basing relations are established and whether we can make sense of non-inferential OERs. Some of the best work on inference has emerged only in the last five years. More work must be done on non-inferential OERs. The results of the literature on ontology, basing and inference pave the way for this work, which should start now.

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